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ABSTRACT

A brief historical account of developments in early childhood education in New Zealand is presented as background for a discussion of current research in this area. Five main sources of research in New Zealand, each with a special research style and field of interest are cited: (1) the universities, (2) the Department of Education, (3) women's movements, (4) preschool movements, and (5) the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER). It is concluded that each of these agencies sees early childhood education and care differently and that those personally involved in the field have generally taken adults as their subjects while others tend to look at children and their treatment. Universities are involved in three typical kinds of research: child development studies, studies of preschools as classrooms and reviews of research literature, with emphasis on early childhood education aimed at individual children. The Department of Education Research and Planning Unit has worked in the area of monitoring and evaluation and viewed early childhood education, in part, in relation to sets of teaching procedures and practices. Women's movements are concerned with how women are coping with care of the young and help the community offers women. The section on preschool movements cites a parent-helping project, a Maori association playcenter project and a teachers' association study on male/female composition of decision-making bodies. The NZCER's Early Childhood Unit is reported to be collaborating with playcenters on a parent helper project and with Maori groups on parent training. (Author/[illegible])

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A REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND PRESENT TRENDS IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Geraldine McDonald

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Address given to the Canterbury Institute for Educational Research, 31 May, 1976.

A REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND PRESENT TRENDS IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION*

Geraldine McDonald NZCER

I am going to start by giving an historical account of developments in early childhood education in New Zealand in order to provide a backdrop for a discussion of research in this area. My outline of these developments will be of the "once-over-lightly" kind. In other words I shall skip the footnotes and provide only a survey of general trends. In this way I will be able to talk about my special interests and to reveal my prejudices and at the same time make it very difficult for anyone to prove me wrong. Oh well, there's scholarship for you.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND

The first period, from 1889-1941, can be considered as one of establishment - the establishment of free kindergartens. The kindergarten method was established as the correct method of educating pre-school children. Kindergarten trained teachers worked in free kindergartens but they also became governesses, taught junior classes in private schools, and conducted their own private kindergartens in the wealthier suburbs. The free kindergarten training centre in Wellington had, for some years, a class for children of school age and students were trained to work with children over five. And, quite apart from the free kindergarten movement, kindergarten methods influenced, to some extent, junior classes in state schools. During these years there was a continuing attempt to provide care and education for the urban poor. On the other hand "free" kindergartens were never really free even though no child was turned away because his parents could not pay. Parents were always asked to make donations and the teachers were supposed to help with raising money for the kindergarten. Throughout most of this period household servants were available and the <u>access</u> of children to pre-school education (and therefore its <u>supply</u>) does not appear to have been a major issue. What was an issue was <u>acceptance</u> of kindergartens by the general public.

The departure of husbands during the Second World War brought the issue of supply of pre-school services to the fore and, as most of you

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here will know, playcentres arose in order to solve this particular problem. But it was not just supply that was the issue. Diversification in the whole area of child care was also needed. Day nurseries and creches were set up during the war to cater for the children of working mothers. Day nurseries and creches were closed down in the years after the war but the playcentres, once established, were here to stay. Playcentres survived partly because they were sessional (that is they ran regular sessions for only part of the day) and for children from 2½ or 3 to 5 years. Therefore, they were not really encouraging mothers to shirk their duties, although playcentre mothers were frequently accused of this; and they did not encourage separation of mother and child, another fear of the post-war years. Supply of pre-school services continued to be a problem from 1940 onwards and the problem is still with us. The Consultative Committee on Pre-School Educational Services which reported in 1947 recognised the need for improved supply but not apparently for diversification. After 1948, when the first Officer for Pre-School Education was appointed to the Department of Education, diversity gave way to improved standards, greater uniformity of provision, and increased supply.

During the 1960s the issue was equality of opportunity. It was the time of the Maori Education Foundation's work in pre-school education and the rapid expansion of playcentres into rural areas. It became apparent during this period that further diversification was needed because the established forms of pre-school institution, playcentres and kindergartens, were not acceptable to all communities. Family pre-schools arose and there was a rapid spread of family play-groups catering often, but not always for younger children than were admitted to kindergartens and playcentres. By 1970 it had become clear that supply of services was not the only problem and that thought also needed to be given to ways of supporting diverse forms. However, the Committee of Inquiry into Pre-School Education set up in 1970 was, like the earlier Consultative Committee, concerned rather more with supply than with diversification and, as a result, looked to extend and improve what already existed. I think there are reasons why both committees concentrated on supply. One is that the

model they were unconsciously using was based on the state school system; another, the knowledge that government departments work by regulations and formulas; and, finally perhaps, a belief that there are certain forms of pre-school acceptable to all sections of New Zealand society. It is this last belief that has been challenged in the 1970s. The child care movement has now joined the kindergartens and playcentres as a third major movement and we can at last speak with some accuracy of early childhood education and care in New Zealand. The Maori Pre-Schools have continued to exist. For up to ten years in some instances. Secondary schools have set up creches for adult students. Teachers colleges and universities have set up creches for their students. There have been numerous attempts to combine human development for secondary school students with school playgroups. Co-operative day care schemes have appeared. Some city councils are supporting child care groups. There have been at least two attempts to set up family day care schemes. Primary school principals have encouraged pre-school groups in schools. Community pre-school workers in Otara have started groups in homes and churches.

The growth of the women's movement, the recent Report of the Select Committee on Women's Rights, and the various seminars held in connection with International Women's Year have had the result of changing, quite sharply, many women's attitudes to day care. The whole question of who should care for children and how should they be cared for became, perhaps, the central issue of International Women's Year. So far as I can tell, women are not lining up to put their children into day care so that they can go out to work, but they are now refusing to accept that the only person fitted to care for the child is the mother and they are less convinced and less frightened by the various stories they have been told over the last thirty odd years about the terrible results that may occur if mothers are separated from their children. They also believe that day care should not be restricted only to "families in need" which is the attitude behind the placing of the administration of day care under the Department of Social Welfare.

One of the most interesting developments of the last year or two has been a strengthening of the place of the parent in pre-school education. The deliberations of the Educational Development

Conference illustrated this trend. The participation of parents has been just as strong a theme as has been the call for day care and these two views have not been in opposition.

If I may digress for a moment - an interesting point concerns the place of playcentres in relation to the women's movement. Playcentres in the early days clearly served to liberate women from confinement to the home but social events eventually overtook the movement and as the tide of feminism rose there appeared far more radical suggestions for equality than those offered by the playcentre movement. In fact for a while the stand of playcentre and parents centre that the place of the mother is in the home was certainly reactionary in relation to other views on the place of women. However, what playcentres have been working towards in recent years has been the inclusion of men in the role of parent. In other words, equality within home and family. During International Women's Year, playcentre people pressed for the sharing of child care by men and women on an equal basis and urged alterations in the school curriculum to prepare boys for parenthood. As one who attended the Prime Minister's Conference on International Women's Year I can assure you that while there is now considerable support from men on a woman's right to advance in the work force, men find deeply disturbing, demands that they should share child care equally with women.

Thus the playcentre movement has retained its "liberating" function by pressing for genuine equality within the home and has ended up asking for something which the majority of men find more radical than a woman's right to work.

I have divided the history of early childhood education in New Zealand into four periods. In the first which lasted until the 1940s the issue was establishment and acceptance. In the second which lasted until 1960 it was supply and standards. In the third, which lasted until about 1970, it was equality of access to pre-school. In the fourth and present period it is diversification of provision that is the major issue. And here I would refer you to a paper by the Director-General of Education which illustrates this point (Renwick, 1975).

I have looked at the periods of development in early childhood education mainly from the point of view of supply and demand. But one can also look at things in another way. In the early stages pre-school

education tended to be provided by one social group for another social group. In time this changed so that women provided pre-school education for their own children. Now I'm going to suggest that the Department of Education has got on much better when it has dealt with groups doing things for other groups than when it has dealt with groups providing for themselves.

I do not think that the Department of Education has yet discovered how to develop the right kind of relationship between itself as a bureaucratic organisation and the voluntary groups of parents working for themselves and their children. Of course, I could also point out that the voluntary groups have not yet discovered the right kind of relationship with the Department. This is not the result of ill-will, stupidity or personalities on either side. It arises because the Department's role is to interpret whatever happens to be the policy of the party in power, and sell all new ideas to the Treasury. This almost always entails the development of "formulas" for pre-schools - formulas for the distribution of public money; standards for buildings, sites, and equipment; regulations on staffing; uniformity of training; and so on. A bureaucratic solution is usually a formula that can be applied nationally. For the parent half of the early childhood partnership a solution often needs to be tailor made for a particular neighbourhood or social group. I have certainly exaggerated the differences in aims and objects but I want to point up the nature of these differences.

To end this section of my talk I want to point out that in early childhood education we are looking at social movements; we are not dealing with schools.

Research on Early Childhood

There are five main sources of research into early childhood education and care

(a) Universities
(b) Department of Education
(c) Women's Organisations
(d) Pre-School Movements
(e) NZCER

Each has a special style of research. Each has a special field of interest. In discussing these agencies I will refer you to

Early Childhood Research in New Zealand to which I have appended some extra titles to bring it up to date.

Universities

The universities have produced the greatest number of separate pieces of work most of which have been student theses. While the studies cover a wide range there are three kinds of studies which are typically university ones. These are child development studies, studies of pre-schools as classrooms, and reviews of research literature. Of these, the child development emphasis is most marked and for many academics, I suspect, research in early childhood education is synonymous with research in child development and with what happens to children's personalities, intellects, and behaviour as a result of contact with a pre-school centre. The underlying assumption is that early childhood education exists for individual children.

Department of Education

The work of the Department of Education's Research and Planning Unit has, so far, been in the area of evaluation. An evaluation has already been made of the pioneer polytechnic child care courses and we can expect monitoring studies of a similar kind as new procedures in the early childhood education field are introduced by the Department. The underlying assumption is that early childhood education consists, in part, of sets of teaching procedures and practices.

Women's Movements

What women's movements such as the Society for Research on Women (1975), the Women's Electoral Lobby (1975), and the New Zealand Federation of University Women (1976) look at is how women are coping with the care of the young and what help the community offers them with this task. These women's groups all interpret child care very broadly - in fact they give it a new meaning to include all care whether inside or outside the home and whether educational or custodial. The underlying assumption is that the care of children is a broad social issue extending far beyond playcentres and kindergartens.

Pre-School Movements

The New Zealand Playcentre Federation is currently carrying out a

study of parent helping. Te Roopu Awhina Tamariki has reported a pilot project in which Te Roopu members worked with two playcentres. The New Zealand Free Kindergarten Teacher's Association (NZFKTA, 1975) has made a study of the male/female composition on decision-making bodies affecting early childhood education. The assumption of the first two studies is that parents, not children, are the primary target of early childhood education. The NZFKTA study is also concerned with adults although not directly with parents.

NZCER

The New Zealand Council for Educational Research, unlike the other agencies mentioned, exists to investigate those things which organisations suggest it should investigate. John Watson has given a full account of this process in an address he gave to the Convention on Early Childhood Care and Development last August. (Watson, 1975). In the Early Childhood Unit we are at present collaborating with the playcentres on the Parent Helper Project, and with Maori groups on parent training. Rae Julian, the present J.R. McKenzie Fellow, is studying neighbourhood family day care, a project which arose from a SROW study. Penny Jamieson is helping a child care group associated with the Wellington City Council assess the needs of an inner city area. All these projects have adults rather than children as subjects. David Barney, as you will know, studied supply of, and access to, pre-school education and care. However, we have also embarked on a Going to School Project (still in its early stages) in which Margery Renwick is looking at the transition of children from home or pre-school to school. I do not know exactly what are our assumptions are about early childhood education apart from the view that it is what groups directly concerned with it believe it to be.

The conclusion that I want to draw from this brief account of the kinds of research emanating from the different agencies is that each sees early childhood education and care through a different lens and, furthermore, that those personally involved in the field have generally taken adults as their subjects while those outside it tend to look at children and their treatment. These are not mere quirks of fate but

arise from fundamental differences in orientation. The universities, for example, have a psychological orientation and focus on children as individuals, the women's movements are aware of social influences and forces, and the pre-school people are interested in organisational matters and in the relationships between parents and children.

SOME EXAMPLES

So much for general trends. I now want to take two situations in which it is possible to observe what those involved say they want in the way of research and what outsiders say they should want in the way of research.

At the beginning of last year I was approached by a representative of the Maori organisation Te Roopu Awhina Tamariki about the possibility of assisting research to be carried out by their own members. Te Roopu is an association of Maori men and women who have worked with Aboriginal Family Education Centres in Australia under the leadership of Lex Grey. They now wish to offer their services to pre-school groups in New Zealand and at the time I met their representatives they had already reported a small pilot project based on Murupara and Minginui playcentres. I suggested that the organisation should make a formal request for assistance to NZCER so that our Council could consider their needs. Because there is an advisory committee for my own unit, I prepared an outline of a possible research project and sent this off to the members of my advisory committee before their first meeting. I then received a request from one of the members of this committee to the effect that the Waikato-based Maori Family Education Association (of which she was the President) would also like to be included in a research project. So I prepared another outline which would involve both Te Roopu Awhina Tamariki and the Maori Family Education Association. This was approved by my advisory committee. It was then written out once again and went to the Council of NZCER - and so on. But the progress of the project is another story. What is important is that both MFEA and Te Roopu, quite independently, wanted to do the same thing: research and development studies of working with parents. The project is now under way using the resources of the two organisations, and although it has suffered a few changes since its

first formulation, it is still concerned with the working out of Maori ways in the conduct of a training programme for parents. Last month a small research team drawn from the Maori organisations, NZCER, Department of Education and Department of Maori Affairs (it all sounds very official but is really just a group of people known to each other and trusted by each other) went to the four Maori pre-schools which are to be the bases for the study and spent time sitting and listening to what the mothers wanted. Two of these pre-schools are in small towns and two are on rural marae. Then, last week, the research team met for two days in Hamilton to work out ways and means of conducting the study and, what was of special importance, to develop a philosophy both for the research project and for the training programme. It is already clear for example, that the pre-schools are to be regarded as groups of adults and children. There is no suggestion that pre-school education is for individual children. Adults are to be as important as children. The training programme will be concerned with the family as a whole and, if the need arises, the problems of adolescent children will be of equal importance to those of the pre-schooler. Respect is to be developed for things Maori and for traditional customs and settings. Children are to be helped to feel pride in their heritage. I shan't go on but I think this will give you an idea of Maori ideas on research in early childhood education.

Perhaps now we can look at what outsiders think is needed in the field of Maori pre-school education. My own study Maori Mothers and Pre-School Education is a Pakeha project and although it deals with adults, and is thus in line with Maori interests, and although it reports what Maori women said, it is, nevertheless, a Pakeha work because it is concerned with the reception of Pakeha institutions by Maori communities and Maori individuals. Maoris, would, as I have already suggested, tackle such a project by determining their philosophy and by trying to promote Maoritanga in the broadest sense in pre-schools.

Other Pakeha projects have been concerned with whether or not Maori pre-school children speak standard English. I have myself made an exploration of Maori and Pakeha meaning systems for a set of English words. Maori women, however, are interested in preserving

the Maori language. There is interest amongst Pakehas in whether Maoris show achievement motivation. Maoris on the other hand want teachers to change their attitudes to Maoris and to recognise the strengths that Maori children bring with them to school. Pakehas become very excited about special programmes for teaching Maori pre-school children but Maori people show far less enthusiasm for these believing that their children are not inherently disadvantaged and that to promote special programmes of the kind offered for the disadvantaged simply perpetuates stereotypes and fails to deal with the real issues.

Playcentres and Kindergartens

What do playcentre people want in the way of research? Bruce McMillan (1975) in a thoughtful paper on research in early childhood education delivered to a Massey University Extension seminar in 1975 notes (p.3) that "in 1971 the Education Committee of the New Zealand Playcentre Federation received suggestions from playcentre parents throughout the country.... the resulting ideas for research were collated and sent on to all university and other groups capable of undertaking research. Perhaps the exercise generated some thinking", he says, "but to my knowledge no specific research programmes were directly derived from it". Oh ye of little faith! One of the lists of suggestions eventually arrived on my desk. As things have turned out I took the first research topic on the playcentre list and am now, in collaboration with the NZPCF, putting it into effect. The topic, is the one I referred to earlier, a study of parent helping. What outsiders seem to think is needed is a study of the training of playcentre personnel and an examination of the activity programme for children.

I have not been approached by kindergarten interests to carry out any research although I have been asked on many occasions for information on issues of importance to kindergarten teachers: for example, on the effects of pupil-teacher ratios. However Wendy Lee and Don Stedman of NZFKTA made a study as a contribution to the Education Department seminar on "Education and the Equality of the Sexes". This was a detailed study of the male/female ratio on

bodies concerned with making decisions about kindergartens, kindergarten teaching and kindergarten teachers.

It has been suggested to me by a pre-school adviser that a study of the role of the adviser would be useful and various suggestions for research came through the seminar on "Education and the Equality of the Sexes".

If one examines the various proposals and suggestions made by those involved in early childhood education one can see that participants appear to be most interested in their own part in early childhood education and hence in the role of adults.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this paper I want to return to the outline of developments in early childhood education and care I began with and to look particularly at the stage we are in at present. I suggested that it is diversification of provision which is the major issue. How can we provide services custom-built for communities? I think we could do with some research on this issue. Perhaps, for example, someone could examine the organisation of early childhood education and care in other countries noting the kind of administrative structures that permit new forms to emerge. The Australian Children's Commission is one type of structure that should be examined. There are interesting suggestions for New Zealand in Philip Lawrence's (1975) "Cook's tour of early childhood care and education". Then again, perhaps there should be a study of the existing acts and regulations which, in New Zealand prevent new forms of pre-school institution emerging, and we badly need a good case study of the political processes which determine pre-school practices and provisions. There are a number of problems besetting early childhood education which are basically a consequence of its being a women's domain. The history and fortunes of the Kindergarten Teachers Association would be a rewarding topic both as a case study of a female union and as an example of what occurs in negotiations for salaries of women.

We need studies of the effects of size of pre-school group, ratio of adults to children and size of building in relation to the behaviour of adults and children. Very little research appears to have

been done on these matters at pre-school level and I think they are the matters I have most often been asked about lately.

There are a number of issues connected with the training of workers in early childhood education which would benefit from some thought and investigation. For example, what is the best kind of training for community pre-school workers and for pre-school advisers?

As you will probably realise I have picked out a number of policy issues and have given examples that fit the varying styles of the different research agencies I mentioned earlier. Finally, while I do not think for one moment that all research has to answer current problems it is obviously desirable for at least some research to do so. For this reason, I am particularly interested in studies carried out in collaboration with other organisations. In many ways such studies are rewarding. They are, for example, companionable, much as pre-school education in New Zealand is companionable and the research worker can be sure of an audience for the final report. And believe me that is no small consideration.

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